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# **“Enric Miralles’ Santa Rosa’s Park in Mollet del Vallés: Redefining public space in contemporary city”.**

**EURAU’12**

*ABSTRACT: This article attempts to show the influence of Enric Miralles’ project in Santa Rosa’s park (1992-2001), in Mollet del Vallés (North-West of Barcelona). How in the middle of an empty, degraded, and useless field, the contemporaneous architect assumes the responsibility of intervene to give live to this wasteland generating an ideal landscape, amending the breach previously existing in the surroundings. This project proves that there are still some models and practices that enlighten the future of public space in contemporary city. The park shows that the local authorities chose the right man for the job. Nowadays, the people of the districts of Santa Rosa, Plana Lledó and Can Borrell (a very old neighborhood, a working-class district of the 60’s and a new neighborhood) walk freely and enjoy collectively of the environment.*

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**KEYWORDS:** site, landscape, public space, contemporary city, natural, artificial

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## 1. The request

Since 1983, the emplacement of the park was already registered in the local urban development plan of Mollet. This plan was National award of architecture the same year.

The first encounters with Enric Miralles with the customer can be traced back to spring 1993, when Miralles showed to Concha Bohigas, *Service Director of the Area de Territorio* de Mollet del Vallés his work in the Icaria Avenue, in the Olympic Complex in Barcelona. The facilities for the archery shooting range olympic competition of 1992 of Valle de Hebrón and the civic center of Hostalets de Balenyà.

December 16, 1993, the Mollet's town council adjudicates the park design and development to Enric Miralles.

The economical viability was developed in continuous steps following this outline:

- May 1997 (box 11,635 of the Town Hall Archive) the second fase of the project is delivered to the town hall.

- January 1998, Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue found EMBT, Arquitectes associats

- November 1999, third phase of the project is delivered at town hall.

- June 2000 fourth and last phase of the project is delivered.

The construction is officially finished July 13, 2001, and the same day the park is inaugurated by the theatre group *La Fura dels Baus*.

The first phase contemplated the output of the park. Perimetral walls, topography, design of pavement, playgrounds, skating rink, benches, petancas areas and similar output.

The second phase expected to build a civic center inside this artificial landscape. The building would stend along a series of walls sustained by pillars, that would define the limits of the park. This buildings were never built, but Miralles would recycle the designs to project the Palafolls Public Library.

The construction development was complex, as we can see in the first certificate of the construction signed by Enric Miralles and by a fax sent to the mayor where Enric Miralles requests collaboration and understanding with the demands by the contactor to agilize the construction outline. [1]

Miralles was able to supervise most of the construction even if he sadly died in July 2000, before he could see his work finished.

## 2. Miralles at the time of the project

By the time he received the confirmation of the project, in 1993 [2], he poses alone in the studio in Avinyo street, in the historical center of Barcelona. There he came with the model of his proposal for the public adjudication for the new hall for Valencia University. In 1989 he divorced his first professional partner Carme Pinos. This independent period is intensely creative, in proposals everywhere and projects characterized by a strong poetic and artistic influence. Even if Benedetta Tagliabue

started collaborating with him in 1990, their professional union did not arrive until January 1998.

At the time his proposal was adjudicated, other projects like the new Igualada`s cemetery and the sports center for Huesca are still ongoing and he has monographic expositions of his work and the GSD of Harvard University and the AEDES gallery in Berlin. His academically inheritance comes since 1990 as Professor and Director of the Master Class in the Stadelshule of Frankfurt and the Kenzo Tange Chair at Harvard University.

### 3. The place

The park is located in a industrial town in Barcelona`s periphery and extends in an area of thirty thousand square meters. This land, was unurbanized, marginal area, product of the Spanish Urban Development from the 1960`s, where a large wave of rural population migrated to the urban areas, located between the neighborhoods of Plana Lledò, Santa Rosa, and the Nou Eixample Nord. In the following picture [Fig 1] we can appreciate the land that Miralles faced during his visit in 1992.



[Fig. 1]

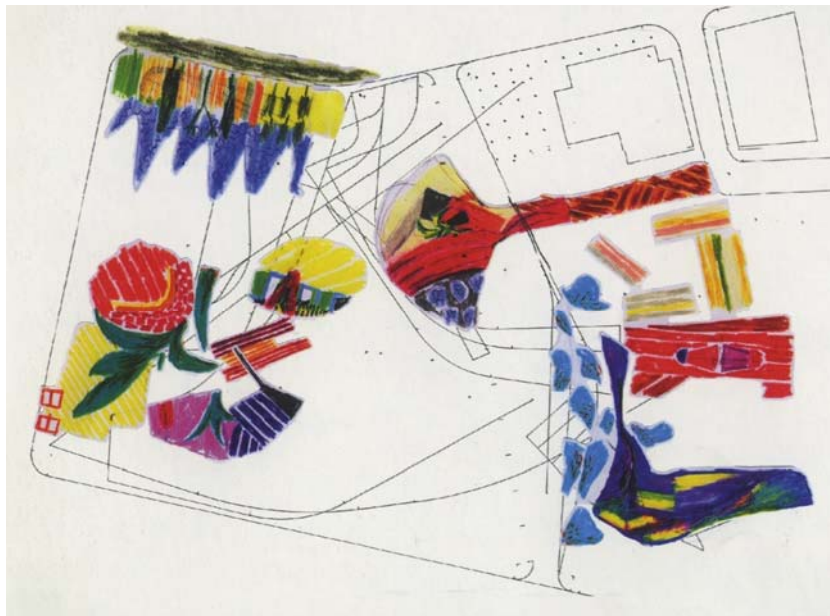
*"...When we are not trying to have a fresh start imposing a project and we try to develop a sensibility towards reality, architecture has not other choice but to criticize itself about the location and program. The solar, as the other projects, such Besòs park, La Mina building, the Valle de Hebron shooting range, the cemetery of Igualada, are far from become an ideal and coherent place... In this project are, in fact, certain critic causality: there are doubts about the belonging of the location, doubts about the quality of the surroundings. However, there is only the possibility of solving them in a positive way. Paradoxically, the critic answer about the place has a positive answer..."* Enric Miralles. [3]

*"...The reality of the place... it is a place that could be defined as a social topography... where the topography mixes with the social desire of the project of transforming a marginal emplacement into a public construction...We still did not have the chance of fixing recent time in this place... Almost nothing physical has left its print here... The building that has to appear here claims for a topography, so this must be our first priority for construction".* Enric Miralles [4]

#### 4. The abstraction as a Project strategy

*"...The same way as Land Art 's works are not a representation of the landscape on which they are inserted, but rather redefine it. Miralles' work acts equally redefining its place of emplacement: its topography, its shape, its dimension... redefining this way the qualities of the area."* Juan Antonio Cortes [7]

*"...my projects depend on much more than just the eye..... I like how real the project seems when you are there.... The best example of this might be our Park at Mollet.. . One is a drawing in which you see the park and the classical relationship between it and the housing. You don't distinguish between the density of this area and the density of the city, because it is a rather poor neighborhood... we liked that because the city and its shadows are completely mixed with nature. There is a lot of neighborhood reality and the geometries extend into the project. ...we don't want to ignore these kinds of things in the neighborhood."* Enric Miralles. [8]



[Fig. 2]

The particular conditions of the area imposed to Miralles the need for new tools to face the project. The first drawings on which Miralles faces the problematic of the project show a set of lines that floods the entire park. He begins from a solar corner and continues to the extremes. The lines evolve among themselves to continue afterwards an independent path defining places that will later welcome different functions. [Fig. 2]

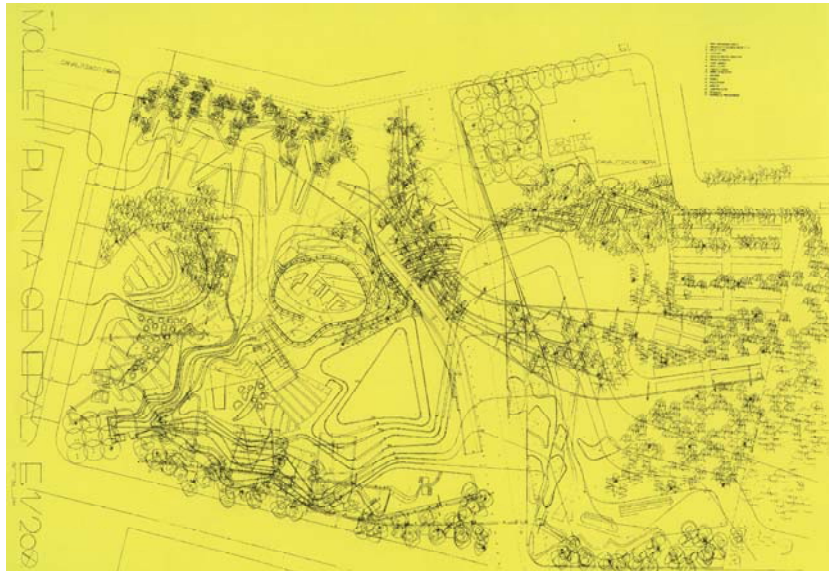
*"The most horrific the world becomes, the more abstract art becomes, while in a happy world asks for itself for an art for here and now."* Worringer [9].

The line is constituted as an abstract initial element to become the project. Abstract lines with strong meanings, lines that Miralles extracted from the vanguard time and its artists: Alexander Rodchenko and Paul Klee.

The line as an initial guide, as an instrument to know the place and learning to behave in it. This lineal reality, to which Miralles refers when talks about the flux of people moving gave the necessary clues to properly understand the place.

Miralles, with this project, faces a new operating method as the location deserves.

*"...The project of this park and civic center is a starting point from the previous projects. This is not about a formal origin directly related with the specific topographic situation...The project existed in the panting for another construction in this place... The activities that will take place there already exist, but today are taking place in streets and different spaces... I started working trying to think in a building that would imply a landscape that did not exist there... an ideal landscape... This project is literary from the beginning, anecdotic... to show in an specific way: when the neighbors of Plana Lledó and Santa Rosa enter the construction..."* Enric Miralles[10]



[Fig. 3]

In the architecture that Miralles did until the time (Igualada, Hostalets, Huesca, Alicante...) the colour was not protagonist. However, already in the first drafts of the project we would use colour as a differentiating agent for surroundings, functions and paths. [Fig. 2]

Miralles started the project from a corner where all the topographic lines start. Some concrete suspended walls also start in this point with influences from "le corbuserians", with two types of bricks as finishing touches. The suspended walls constitute the materialization of the message of the lines. . Lines witch Miralles started the project, containing energies that would later become constructed elements.

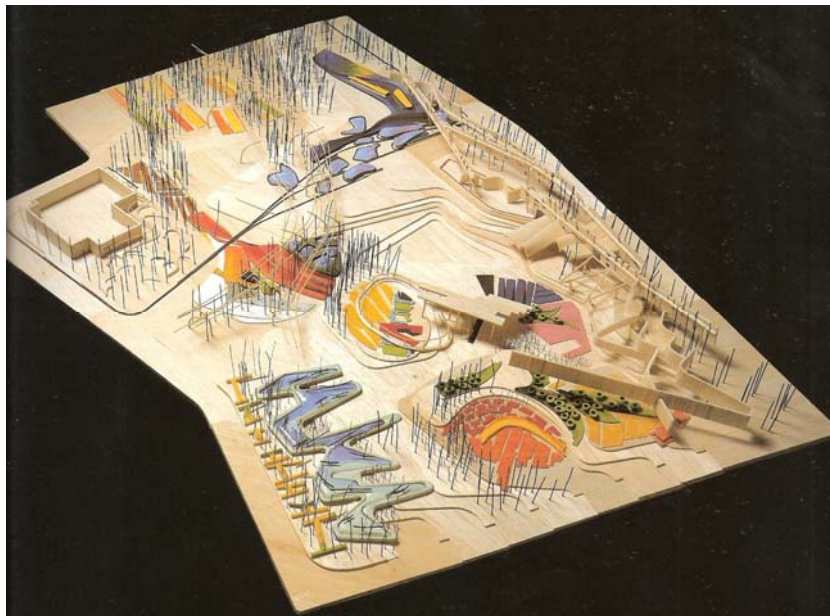
The succession of arcades (succession that Miralles had already done in Icaria Avenue) lead to the tier that forms the center of the park. This tier focalizes the looks and absorb the lateral walls of the park. There are not only masts that march, but the specific time in history in witch the park was designed as well as the future of the whole area. This march in the mind of Miralles opens with time the tradition and the immediate present. Modernism and industrial periphery.

The bonds that keep the bricks laying sideways reminds to the front walls of the industrial buildings of the working ring for the nearby suburbs for large cities like Mollet became for Barcelona. The other bond for bricks reproduces a lattice more usual in the times of the Catalan Modernism. Miralles resembles and tributes the differences and similitude of the simple, functional urban architecture in this industrial area and the complex, artistic architecture of the Catalan Modernism. [11]

With this intromission in time, Miralles wants to show that his park is part of a larger temporal chain.

The three suspended walls with letters that Miralles projects, impose a break in time, imposing his own. This characters are graffitists that crown the park as huge concrete and steel umbrellas, referring to the graffiti painted by the younger neighbors in the walls of the surrounding buildings. This suspended walls witch characters, have a message trough three large signs in them. "PARC MOLLET / LUDOTECA AVIS / SANTA ROSA" and represent a physical limit for the park, since they marc the gate to cross in order to enter the park and being able to reed correctly the meaning of the letters painted on them facing the interior of the park.

The masts in the Icaria Avenue reappear here as a reminder to the neighbors Miralles' authority of the project. Authority that he again signs in one of the fountains from with his own handwriting.



[Fig. 4]



In the park as in his work, we can see the thinking of Georges Bataille and a refuse of a lineal progression as a way of defining his projects. The spacial conception from which all of this comes from is that of a social landscape where institutions, context, and nature fuse together in an interactive relationship. His method of intervention feeds of what is already there and the inheritance of the common cultural flood.

It is important not to forget in his architecture the importance of nature and the Mediterranean climate, as well as the influences of his local Catalan lineage that includes artists such as Gaudí, Jujol or Coderch.

*"...The main interest of this project is, maybe, not directly in it, but in the "themes" in it contained (as the ones of suspension of the building, of graffiti becoming architecture of the colour of a painting becoming, of the suspended spirit of the users, of unexpected connections ...We like to think that this project could be a project for the "near future" being a more subtle conception of architecture."* Benedetta Tagliabue. [12]

## 5. The park

The peripheral nature of the terrain and the line of plane trees next to the boulevard that crosses the park constitute the only information that the location offers to the architect. Against this lack of identity, the first objective is to redefine the local conditions before starting building. This is a recognition of the reality of the area, in which the topography combines itself with a social desire for the project, a desire to turn this marginal area into a shared public construction that everyone can enjoy. Here is where the concept of social topography referred by the locals about the change from a wasteland into a place where the community could gather and do common activities. It is here where the conversations that Miralles has with the neighbors have special meaning. Thanks to this contact with the people to whom the park is built, made him focus on the social aspect of the design. Any local deficiency is compensated by their surprise and festive spirit of an invented place. This park was born in Miralles' mind as a series of relationships between the artificial elements substituting the output that the topography traditionally offers. [5]

To obtain this, Miralles appealed to the code of signs (of which the pieces of pavement or walls that configure the symbolism are essential part) and refers metaphorically to the diversity of the multiple pictures accumulated in the town's identity established through time. This fragmented and apparently unlinked language generated by the park, will merge with time into the urban landscape with local vegetation and surrounding buildings. The perimeter walls acotate the intervention, every detail in the park is meticulously designed to delimitate this landscape. The limits adulterate the lines of public furniture were the pieces of wall screen the sunshine and evoke an urban decoration where the graffiti culture was born. This abstract and over dimensioned typography will print shadows on the floor and will support the pedagogic and recreational character of the park.

The changing decoration for the pavement indicates the different activities' areas in the park. The children's playground under the cover of the existing building, the petanca's area, the skating rink, the resting areas in the margins or the fountains standing on the concrete and clinker.

The topography is punctually altered, giving a hollow in the middle for street theatre and other open shows.

Vegetation, forms compact masses, affirming the division with small forests evolving the benches and the more calmed areas in the park where the locals can find unusual peace in this industrial area. Gathered by species, the trees also contribute to characterize the different functional areas. The willows surround the fountains, the mulberry trees delimitate the playgrounds and the eucalyptus are planted around the entire park's perimeter. The existing trees are complemented with others from the same families. The lampposts bend as if they were long willow benches accompanying the travesy around the park. Among them, the freshness from the disperse fountains lead the path, with water appearing and disappearing along the day, as puddles after copious rain.



[Fig. 5]

The park, in which there was planned a new phase on which a civic center would be built (this was never built here, but the use of the designed can be traced in the Parafolls' public library) had to serve as a meeting point, a theater where every common activity could take place. The result of this is a metaphor that colors a new face for the city. The park symbolizes a fusion between the natural component of every park with the artificial elements, such as street lights, benches and other urban hardware.

Working in the combination of colors and different materials (painted concrete, bricks, ceramics, steel, and wood) combined with the changing lights and shadows as the day progresses, seeming at first as a random imprevisible changing park, and where after a closer look, we can appreciate the attention to the detailed by the architect.

The colors of the park establishes a communication with the locals, that may seem distant at first, and a familiar, functional and perfectly integrated landscape that is able to interpret on its own the conflicts and complexity that an industrial periphery generates and increases.

In the border of the city, the park awaits as a oasis, with the power of amusement that only an oniric location can produce.

*"...I have always being particularly interested in this work of EM&BT due to my believe that this is precisely a garden of this dimensions where the use conditions impose to the architect are more relaxed and where the change can introduce more of the author imagination, in this case they prove their great power of imagination for the freedom of shapes and material treatment that I consider particularly extraordinary."* Federico Correa. [6]

This article hopes to demonstrate how brave the bet that the public servants of the city made to turn their industrial suburb into a modern contemporary city trough a compromised architecture and quality represented by the figure of Enric Miralles, even with the critics received by public and political opposition from some people, among them neighbors of Mollet, who did not understand the role or need for that architecture. The risk that the local politicians took in terms of votes, with an strong opposition to a risky project that might not have succeeded as it finally did. More importantly, the example of an architect used to deal with tough situations, who following his own style and way to operate, with a strong ethical call, serving the public, mindful of the responsibility that a contemporary architect has for the construction of a better society trough architecture and art.

Miralles demonstrates us with his example that even in the worst case scenario, the architect should have a positive attitude, never surrender to dejection and pessimism. Opposed to that, Miralles shows us with his example how optimism, hard work, passion, perseverance, desire to serve society, ethics, esthetics, imaginations, creativity and other positive qualities that showed trough his legacy are present in the project of the park of Santa Rosa in Mollet.

Good architecture, compromised with society, a marriage between ethics and esthetics, proves how necessary is for society and for a contemporary city. Remember what the wasteland where the park was built looked like before the intervention of all the people involved in the making of the park. Then contrast this effort with the feelings evoked by a simple walk around this park. The happiness with witch the neighbors enjoy the park, how the work of an architect can emotionally move the neighbors showing the still important role of architects in today´s society.

## Notes

[1] To check it, is enough to consult the fax sent by Miralles to the mayor of Mollet, View the book *Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue / Work in Progress*. COAC-ACTAR. 2006, pag. 65.

[2] The picture taken in 1993 constitutes the cover of the book of Josep M. ROVIRA, *Enric Miralles, 1972-2000*. Fundación Caja de Arquitectos. 2012.

[3] This quote is taken from the book of Juan José LAHUERTA, *Enric Miralles: obra completa*. Electa. 1996, pag. 208.

[4] This quote is from the magazine *El Croquis*, 50+72, pag. 366.

[5] For more information consult the article *Parque público, Mollet del Vallés (Barcelona) en AV Monografías*, 81-82. 2000, pag. 116.

[6] This quote is from the film directed by Bigas Luna that appears en el DVD 90 min. De la Fundación Caja de Arquitectos. 2010.

[7] This quote is from the magazine *El Croquis* 2000-2009. El croquis editorial 144. 2009. pag 28.

[8] This quote is from the interview to Miralles by *Focus on architect. GA Interview*. GA INTERNATIONAL 60. 1999. Pages: 100-129.

[9] This quote is from the book "Paul Klee, his work and thought", University of Chicago Press, 1991, pag. 197

[10] This quote is from the magazine *El Croquis* 1983-2000.

[11] For more information consult the article PARQUE DELS COLORS, Mollet del Vallés Barcelona, 1992-2001 from Josep Maria Rovira y Carolina B. Garcia, that appears in the book Josep M. ROVIRA Enric Miralles, 1972-2000. Fundación Caja de Arquitectos. 2012.

[12] This quote is from the magazine GA DOCUMENT 71, pages: 74-95.

## Legends

[Fig. 1] Photomontage of the pictures taken of the landscape that Miralles found in 1992. This picture appears in the book *Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue / Work in Progress*. COAC-ACTAR. 2006, pag. 51.

[Fig. 2] Handmade picture from Enric Miralles that resembles a fruit field seen from the sky, with those powerful colors that Miralles had not used in any previous work. The picture appears in the magazine GA 71.

[Fig. 3] Final blueprint of the intervention on which appear all the functional areas of the park. The picture appears in the magazine GA 71

[Fig. 4] The model of the project as it appears in the book of Juan José LAHUERTA, *Enric Miralles: obra completa*. Electa. 1996, pag. 208.

[Fig. 5] Night picture of the park taken from one of the apartment buildings at the north end as it appears in the book *Enric Miralles Benedetta Tagliabue / Work in Progress*. COAC-ACTAR. 2006.

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## Biography

**José Manuel Mateo Vega** is an architect and M Phil. graduated from the Higher Technical School of Architecture of Madrid (ETSAM). Polytechnic University of Madrid (UPM). He has collaborated with several architects with national prestige such Carmen Espegel Alonso, Ginés Garrido Colmenero, Ricardo Sanchez Lampreave...and has participated in large scale architecture projects as a part of the engineering firm TYPESA: Ciudad Financiera del Grupo Santander, Nueva Terminal del Aeropuerto de Barcelona... Currently he runs his own professional firm MATEO VEGA ARQUITECTOS activity that coordines with his labour of researcher in Madrid. In the academics he has collaborated in several research projects among witch should be mentioned "Study of Average Physicist and Environmental of the city of Toledo" as Researcher Fellowship of Juan de Herrera Institute at ETSAM. He is also a PhD candidate in the Architectural Projects Department at ETSAM, being Director of Doctoral Thesis: Federico Soriano. Title of Doctoral Thesis: "Settlement strategies in Landscape in contemporary Spanish architecture: Enric Miralles"



EURAU12 PORTO, 12\_15 September 2012

Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto

**José Manuel MATEO VEGA**

was present at the sixth edition of EURAU, European Symposium on Research in Architecture and Urban Design, **Public Space and Contemporary City**, held from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2012 at Porto,

with the ARTICLE presentation:

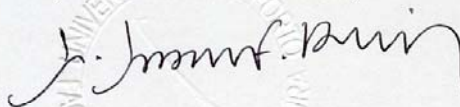
***“Enric Miralles’ Santa Rosa’s Park in Mollet del Vallés:  
Redefining public space in contemporary city”***

(submission #588)

Porto, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012

The Scientific Coordinator EURAU12 Porto,

(Madalena Pinto da Silva)







## **EURAU12 Porto**

**The Organizing and Scientific  
Committees of EURAU12 Porto  
hereby certify that**

**Jose Manuel MATEO VEGA  
was present as a participant in the  
EURAU12 Porto Symposium - Public  
Space and Contemporary City, held  
at the Faculdade de Arquitectura  
da Universidade do Porto,  
Portugal, from the 12th to the 15th  
of September 2012.**

**Porto, 15th of September 2012  
The Organizing Committee,**



**(Madalena Pinto da Silva)**

